

Chief's Message - Summer 2010

High Fire Season began on June 14 in Santa Barbara County this year. Nature did a good job providing us with generous rainfall throughout the winter and spring. Although our reservoirs got refilled, the rain grew some very tall grass which is now dry and brittle. If you're like me, the wild grass gives me hay fever, creates foxtails for my dogs, and also causes significant concern that it could be the source of fuel for many fires this summer. The finer fuel of grass makes it easier for fires to start, and even though starting small, these fires can spread incredibly fast and create havoc. We all need to pay close attention to any source of open flame when we are outdoors. Please use caution when working with gasoline powered mowers, edgers or other cutting tools. A simple spark from a metal blade contacting rocks can start a conflagration. Always have a water source with you and keep an eye on the area you are working on to make sure that there are no incipient fires that could get going after you have left the area.

We have talked briefly about fuel, but weather is the most powerful influence of fire. Most of us in Southern California are familiar with the Red Flag Warning system, which has been developed over the years to provide for increased awareness for the public during times of weather conditions that could create extreme fire behavior. Our communities can restrict access, bring on extra staffing, and implement plans for increased mutual aid. All the fire agencies in the Santa Barbara County Area have agreed to adopt the standards that were developed in conjunction with the National Weather Service (NWS) and the Southern California Multi- Agency Coordination system. A Red Flag warning is issued by the NWS usually 24 hours in advance of weather that has relative humidity (RH) of 15% or less with sustained winds of 25 mph to 35mph for 6 hours or more OR RH of 10% or less with sustained winds of 15 to 25mph for 6 hours or more. It is important to remember that the weather of our Santa Barbara South Coast is unique, and is just one of five areas throughout the county. It could be Red Flag weather in Buellton, and cold and foggy here!

Are you and your family ready for the high fire season? Fire Departments throughout Southern California have come together to develop the READY, SET, GO! program. We want to help our communities be prepared, through active creation of defensible, fire hardened homes, We want everyone who lives in the urban interface area to understand the environmental factors and what can happen during wildfires, and to have family action plans in place that can be activated in case of a nearby fire. Lastly, if the fire does occur, we need everyone to leave early before the fire, so that we can best do our job and make safety of your lives our highest priority. Stop by your local fire station for a brochure on the READY, SET, GO! program; also available at:

http://www.santabarbaraca.gov/NR/rdonlyres/65072F8A-869A-4777-9EE0-65C418C9E614/0/webReady_Set_Go.pdf

Your partner in safety,



Andrew J. DiMizio, Fire Chief